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Chapter VIII

THE FIRST FOUR YEARS

000 IN THE first of this book we have seen the Papago working and living together in the desert. We know something of their way of life and the changes brought to it by contacts with white culture, a little about the Papago outlook on life, and some of the chief personality traits of this Indian group.

128 Now we want to see the Papago as he grows up to be one of the Desert People. This part of the study is a biography, a composite picture of Papago childhood. It is a record of the experiences common to most Papago children, derived from the histories of many of the children studied in both the eastern and the western parts of the Reservation and from the observed behavior of Papago of all ages.

128 This life-story is divided into stages marked by significant changes in the 561 child's behavior toward other persons. These stages correspond roughly to the following age groups: the first four years of life; later childhood (five to ten years); and adolescence (from about eleven to eighteen).

These divisions cannot, however, be taken too literally for a number of reasons. For one, during the transition between phases (for example, four to six years and ten to twelve years) the child's behavior is least clearly defined—not necessarily in the case of the individual child but in regard to Papago children as a whole. Also, the Papago are completely unconcerned with chronology. Though there are baptismal records for most children (except in the extreme West) and a small number of birth certificates, even in Baboquivari District few parents have kept personal records or know their children's birthdays. In the western districts most people simply have been assigned birthdays by the census-taker, and they are unaware of even these hypothetical dates. The significant fact for our purposes is that parents are not interested in and have no knowledge of the dates at which their children achieved certain skills, such as walking and talking.

856 Moreover, the Papago have no formalized age grouping. The only rites
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that define passage from one stage to another—the birth ceremony and the girl's puberty rite—are private occasions which do not serve as announcements but merely as insurance of the well-being of the individual and his family. The terms the Papago use show their indifference to time concepts: the tiny infant is called "just born"; "child," "boy," or "girl" are used from infancy to adolescence, and "girl youth" or "boy youth" between puberty and marriage. In other words, between early infancy and marriage the Papago recognize only two stages: before and after pubescence. However, there is no more radical change in behavior patterns at pubescence than at any other time.

This distinction illustrates very well the usual child development pattern of the Papago; training is informal and leisurely, attuned to the child's natural pace and accomplished with little conscious planning. The process is continuous, with few absolute landmarks; one phase blends into and overlaps those preceding and following it. Small wonder that the Papago use biological manifestations to mark the changes.

Since this study is written for readers who are accustomed to the white pattern of clear age groups and because such classification facilitates comparison with child development elsewhere, the 0–4, 5–10, and 11–18 age groups will be used here. We now turn to the first phase.

BEFORE THE BABY IS BORN

Papago children are more widely spaced than among some Indian tribes and white groups of similar economic status. There are a few families in which a child is born every year, but, judging from census records, in most families births occur from eighteen to thirty months apart.[1] Considering the death rate among Papago children, the average is near the lower end of this range. Most of the women seem to prefer not having a child every year because they feel that they cannot adequately care for so many children and will be likely to lose them. But, as noted in chapter iv, apparently most women take no contraceptive measures, and the taboo on intercourse for a month after childbirth no longer prevails.

Life goes on much as usual for the expectant mother, and there appears to be little illness in connection with pregnancy. No special considerations are shown her, and the pregnant woman performs all her usual tasks, lest she have a difficult birth. On the other hand, she is not segregated or given extra duties.

Some taboos are still in force for prospective parents. They must stay away from animals that make children sick, and they must not touch animal blood. The father avoids killing rattlesnakes and rabbits, but most men no longer re-

1. This statement is qualified by the unconcern with chronology noted above.

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est whimper brings her to him immediately, to talk to him or pick him up. 854
Often she will place him on his back across her knees and pat his chest with a slow regular beat, letting her lower arm fall as a dead weight on him. The stroke is heavy enough to expel the air from his lungs, but he seems to like it. If he persists in crying when she or someone else attends him, the mother eventually quiets him by nursing.

Papago babies are nursed whenever they cry from hunger or when they 853
can be quieted in no other way. Feeding is irregular; the child is usually nursed before bedtime (but this hour varies from day to day), and ordinarily once during the night, oftener if he awakens. Breast feeding is the almost invariable rule.[5]

If he is awake at the family mealtime, the infant sits on his mother's lap at 853
the table. At about six months, when he begins to notice the food in the dishes 862
and perhaps fuss for it, his mother will feed him broth or juices of the food on the table, or perhaps coffee, offering it to him with a spoon. Later he is given bits of mashed beans or potatoes by spoon, and little pieces of tortilla or a section of an orange to chew. At fourteen or sixteen months he is still nursing, but he is also taking regularly most of the solid foods served to the family.

Though still sitting on his mother's lap, the baby begins holding his own spoon at about two years. If he fails to satisfy his hunger, the mother feeds him more when her meal is finished. Since highchairs are not used, the child sits alone only when he is big enough to reach the table from an ordinary bench.

THE YOUNG CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT

From the time he is born until he begins walking, the Papago baby spends 854
almost all his time in his hammock, on a bed, or in someone's arms. Conse- 852
quently, he has little freedom for experimenting with the use of his legs. Some babies crawl on hands and knees, and others begin to walk on all fours with legs straightened. Usually, the baby learns to stand by pulling himself up on boxes or furniture and begins to walk after going through a short crawling stage.

Apparently this occurs between fourteen and twenty-two months, but this 856
is only a rough estimate. Many mothers say, "He walked at about the right time"; but this means little because their judgment is based on the child's size and strength rather than on age. Most mothers say that they do not try to teach their children to walk, that the babies "just do it." It is true that there is no urgent or even systematic coaxing, but many mothers amuse themselves

5. The investigator heard of only two instances of bottle feeding in Hickiwan District, both for supplementary feeding, and one of these was at the suggestion of the white teacher.

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856 by getting the child to take a few steps, and every mother is delighted when her baby starts walking. She beams with pride when she can get the baby to demonstrate the new accomplishment and rewards him with smiles, caresses, and loving words. On the other hand, not much concern is shown if a child seems to be slow in walking, and he is not shamed by his relatives.

Similarly, when he learns to talk is largely determined by the child's own development. The mother usually denies teaching the baby and says that he learned by imitation, though she may coax him by saying a few words and reward him with caresses if he succeeds in imitating her. Children begin efforts at speech at about twenty-two months; by two and a half years they are able to make most of their wants known verbally.

195 All Papago use baby talk in addressing a child until he is about five. There-
854 after he is supposed to enunciate clearly and is embarrassed when adults tease him by addressing him in baby language.

863 Cleanliness training is delayed until the child can walk and understand instruction. The infant wears diapers most of the time, and children up to about two and a half years always wear them in public. However, at home the older baby is frequently dressed only in a shirt. Urination in the yard, or even on the dirt floor of the house, is considered no misdemeanor in one so young. When he is about twenty months old, or earlier if he can walk easily, the mother begins taking him into the bushes away from the house and telling him to urinate there. His older brothers and sisters are instructed to take him with them when they go to the bushes, and he learns largely by imitation. He soon becomes aware of the extreme modesty of his relatives during elimination, and by the time he is three and a half or four years old he knows that he is supposed to go to the bushes with members of his own sex.

Mothers say that they do not have much difficulty with cleanliness training. By the time it is begun, the child is old enough to understand directions and to want to imitate his older playmates, and so he learns quickly. That he is perhaps three years old at the time is no cause for concern from the Papago point of view. If the child soils himself or his clothes after this time, his mother will make a face and utter a disagreeable sound, saying "dirty" or "nasty." She tells him that he is dirty and that he must not do that here, and sometimes she warns him that the animals or ghosts will get him.

863 The white woman trader in the West reports that she has seen mothers try
177 to make children of two and a half or three clean up their feces after they had an accident in the store. The women would scold and threaten all the time and then thoroughly wash the children under an outdoor faucet. Since this treatment was not observed in the home, and no mother mentioned having used